



The Belief of the People of Truth¹ (*Al-Mulha Fī I'tiqād Ahl al-Haqq*) **Sultān al-'Ulamā al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd al-Salām²** Translated and Edited by Dr. GF Haddad

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Exordium

In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah the Owner of power and majesty, infinite might and perfection, favor and munificence, the One, and One Alone, Unique, Everlasting, Who neither begets nor is begotten, and unto Whom nothing compares.

What Allah Is Not

He is not a body endowed with form. He is not a substance confined by boundary or measurement. He resembles nothing and nothing resembles Him. Directions and sides do not encompass Him. Neither the earths nor the heavens contain Him.

¹In al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Rasa'il al-Tawhid* (p. 11-27) and Ibn al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya al-Kubra* (8:219-229).

²'Abd al-Azīz ibn 'Abd al-Salām ibn Abū al-Qāsim ibn al-Hasan, 'Izz al-Dīn al-Sulāmi was born in Damascus in 577H. A Shafi'i scholar, he was educated in Damascus and was nicknamed the Sultan of Scholars. In 599 AH he moved to Baghdad, then returned to Damascus to teach and lead the Friday prayers at the zāwiya of Imām Ghazālī, and later at the Umayyad Mosque. Ibn 'Abd al-Salām condemned the ruler of Greater Syria al-Sālih Isma'il ibn al-Adal from the pulpit for his surrender of the Palestinian fortress Safad to the Crusaders. He was imprisoned for this action. When finally freed, he moved to Cairo, where he was appointed as judge and imām of the Friday prayer. He gained such prestige that he was able to force the Islamic code of law with near impunity in the face of rulers and weak-willed personalities. He later resigned from his position as judge to work on a number of outstanding works on Shafi'i jurisprudence, Qur'ānic explanation, the bases of Islamic rulings, formal legal opinion, government, and Sufism. It is recorded that he kept the company of Abul al-Hasan al-Shadhili, founder of the Shadhili tariqa, and that he authored numerous works on tasawwuf that are now lost. He died in Cairo at the age of eighty-one.

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His Preternity (Beginninglessness)

He was before He brought place and time into existence, and He is now as He ever was.³

His Acts

He created creatures as well as their actions. He decreed the extent of their sustenance and the term of their lives. Every benefit from Him is from His favor, and every punishment is from His justice. **﴿He will not be questioned as to what He does, but they will be questioned.﴾** (21:23)

He established Himself over the glorious Throne in the way that He says and the meaning He intends, “established” in a manner transcending contact (*mumāssa*), settledness (*istiqrār*), fixity (*tamakkun*), indwelling (*hulūl*), or movement (*intiqāl*).⁴

Exalted is Allah the Greatest, the Most High, far above the claims of the people of error and misguidance! Never can the Throne carry Him, rather the Throne and the Throne-Bearers are carried up by the subtlety of His infinite might, and all are powerless (*maḡhūrūn*) in His grasp.⁵

His Knowledge

He encompasses all things with His knowledge. He knows the number of all things that exist. He is well aware of the buried recesses of the hearts and the movements of thought.

³Cf. hadith of the Prophet ﷺ: *kāna allāhu wa lā shay’a ma’ahu / ḡhayruhu / qablahu* – “Allah existed and nothing existed together with Him / other than Him / before Him.” Narrated from Burayda by al-Hakim in *al-Mustadrak* (2:341), who declared it sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) – al-Dhahabi concurred – and from ‘Imran ibn Husayn by Bukhari, Ibn Hibban with two sound chains in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (14:7 #6140, 14:11 #6142), and Ibn Abi Shayba in his *Musannaf*. See Appendix, “Allah is now as He ever was.”

⁴See the appendix entitled “*Istiḡā’* is a Divine Act” in our translation of Bayhaqi’s *al-Asma’ wa al-Sifāt*, published separately. Note that the “Salafis” deny most of the above: “The ‘Salafis’ and Ibn Taymiyya assert that settledness takes place over the Throne.... Ibn Taymiyya strenuously asserts that Allah descends, and can be above (*fawq*) and below (*taht*) ‘without how’.... and that the school of the *Salaf* is the affirmation of everything that the Qur’an stated concerning aboveness (*fawqiyya*), belowness (*tahtiyya*), and establishment over the Throne.” Abu Zahra, *al-Madhāhib al-Islamiyya* (p. 320-322). Ibn Rushd in *Sharḥ al-‘Utbiyya* stated that Malik’s position is: “The Throne is not Allah’s location of settledness (*mawḍi’ istiqrār Allāh*).” As quoted in *Fath al-Bārī* (1959 ed. 7:124 #3592).

⁵“We assert that Allah established Himself over the throne without His need (*ḥāja*) nor settlement (*istiqrār*) upon it, for He it is Who preserves the Throne and other than it without needing any of them.” Abu Hanifa, *Wasiyya al-Imam al-A’zam ila Abi ‘Amr ‘Uthman al-Battī* (p. 10). “Allah established Himself over the Throne in the sense that He said and the meaning that He wills, with an establishment that transcends touch, settlement, location, immanence, and displacement. The Throne does not carry him, rather the Throne and its carriers are carried by the subtleness of His power, subdued under His grip.” Al-Ash’ari, *al-Ibāna ‘an Usul al-Dīyana*, Mahmud ed. (p. 21); Sabbagh ed. (p. 35), as translated in Shaykh Hisham Kabbani’s *Islamic Beliefs and Doctrine According to Ahl al-Sunna* (p. 169). “The carrier of the Throne and of its carriers is in reality Allah Himself.” Abu Sulayman al-Khattabi (d. 386) as quoted in Bayhaqi, *al-Asma’ wa al-Sifāt* (al-Hashidi ed. 2:279-280).

His Seven Main Attributes⁶

He is living (*hayy*), willing (*murīd*), hearing (*samīʿ*), seeing (*basīr*), knowing (*ʿalīm*), mighty (*qadīr*), and speaking (*mutakallim*) with a beginningless (*qadīm*) pre-existent (*azalī*) speech consisting neither in letter (*harf*) nor voice (*sawt*).⁷

His Speech Does Not Materialize

It must never be imagined that His speech turns to ink on tablets and pages or into a design (*shakl*) made visible to the eyes and the pupils, as claimed by the people of gross anthropomorphism (*al-hashw*) and dissimulation (*al-nifāq*). Rather, the act of writing is of the doing of human beings, and their acts must never be imagined to be without beginning.

Note that it is obligatory to hold the tablets and pages in the utmost respect as they point to Allah's Entity (*dhāt*), just as it is obligatory to hold His Names in the utmost respect because they point to His Entity. It is a right due to every thing that points to Allah or relates to Him that it be held in great reverence and that its sanctity (*hurma*) be kept. Hence it is obligatory to revere the Ka'ba, the Prophets, the devout (*al-ʿubbād*), and the scholars of knowledge (*al-ʿulamāʾ*).

*I pass by the houses – Layla's houses –
And I kiss this wall, and that wall;
It is not the love of houses that has obsessed my heart
But the love of those who have dwelled in them.*⁸

Because of something similar to this we kiss the Black Stone, and it is forbidden for someone in a state of minor impurity to touch a volume of the Qur'an: whether it be the lines of its text, or its blank margins, or its leather binding, or the pouch in which it is kept.⁹

⁶These are the *sifāt ma'nawīyya* or "Attributes pertaining to forms." Al-Sanusi said: (*Hashiya al-Bajuri* p. 61-75): "Necessary for Him are seven Attributes, named *sifāt al-ma'āni* ["Attributes of Forms"], which are power (*al-qudra*), will (*al-irāda*), knowledge (*ʿilm*), life (*al-hayāt*), hearing (*al-samʿ*), sight (*al-basar*), speech (*al-kalām*). Next there are seven attributes called *sifāt ma'nawīyya* ["Attributes Pertaining to Forms"], inseparable from the previous seven, namely: His being powerful, willing, knowing, living, hearing, seeing, and speaking." The *Mu'tazila* denied the "Attributes of Forms" but accepted the "Attributes Pertaining to Forms." Their reasoning for doing so was that Allah is perfect and complete in Himself and therefore not in need, for example, of an attribute of knowledge by which He knows, for He is All-Knowing in His essence. They claimed that the logical consequence of the "Attributes of Forms" was "multiplicity of beginningless entities" (*ta'addud al-qudamāʾ*). This reasoning was refuted by the entirety of *Ahl al-Sunna* scholars. See al-Buti, *Kubra al-Yaqīnat al-Kawniyya* (p. 119 n.).

⁷Al-Qurtubi (d. 671) stated in his *Tafsīr* or commentary of Qur'an entitled *al-Jamīʿ li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, concerning the verse **﴿The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an﴾** (2:185) which contains the phrase: **﴿Allah desires ease for you...﴾**: "The verse indicates that Allah is willing (*murīd*) with a beginningless, pre-existent will which stands in addition to His Entity. This is the school (*madhhab*) of *Ahl al-Sunna*. Likewise, He is knowledgeable with true knowledge, able with true ability, living with true life, hearing with true hearing, seeing with true sight, and speaking with true speech. All these are pre-existent existential meanings superadded to the Essence (*ma'āni wujūdiyya azaliyya zāʾida ʿalā al-dhāt*)." See Appendix, "Allah's Names Are Ordained and Non-Inferable." Concerning the verse **﴿And Our word unto a thing, when We intend it, is only that We say unto it: Be! and it is﴾** (16:40) al-Qurtubi says: "There is evidence in this verse that Allah Almighty wills all phenomena – good and bad, beneficent and harmful."

⁸*Diwan Majnun Layla*, p. 170.

⁹In our time a certain scholar has claimed that it was permissible for menstruating women and those in a state of major defilement (*junub*) to recite, touch, and carry the Qur'an. This was refuted by Shaykh Hasan ʿAli al-Saqqaf in

Therefore, woe to him who asserts that Allah's preternal speech is in any way formed of the utterances of human beings, or of designs penned in ink!

His Ninety-Nine Names And The Enduring Good Deeds

The belief of al-Ash'ari – may Allah have mercy on him – consists in what the Ninety-Nine Names of Allah have indicated, by which He has named Himself in His Book and in the Sunna¹⁰ of Allah's Messenger ﷺ.

Allah's Names, in turn, are incorporated (*mundarija*) into four phrases. These phrases are the Enduring Good Deeds.¹¹

Subhān Allāh

The first phrase is *subhān Allāh* or "Glorified is Allah!" The meaning of these two words in the language of the Arabs is transcendence (*al-tanzīh*) and negation (*al-salb*). The phrase consists in the negation of all blemish or imperfection from Allah's Essence and Attributes. All the divine Names that denote negation are incorporated into this phrase. For example, *al-Quddūs*, "the Most Holy," which means most pure of all blemish, and *al-Salām*, "Security," as He is secure from any defect.

Al-Hamdu Lillāh

The second phrase is *al-hamdu lillāh* or "All praise belongs to Allah!" It consists in affirming all kinds of perfection for His Essence and Attributes. Accordingly, all of His Names that form an affirmation, such as *al-ʿAlīm*, the Omniscient; *al-Qadīr*, the Omnipotent; *al-Samīʿ*, the All-Hearing; and *al-Basīr*, the All-Seeing – all these names are incorporated into this second phrase.

We have thus negated, by saying *subhān Allāh*, any conceivable blemish or defect, and we have affirmed, by saying *al-hamdu lillāh*, every manner of perfection (*kamāl*) ever known, and every trait of majesty (*jalāl*) ever seen.

Allāhu Akbar

After what we have negated and affirmed, there still remains much of immense importance which is invisible and unknowable to us. This matter is realized in broad terms by our saying: *Allāhu akbar*, "Allah is greater!" – and this is the third phrase – in the sense that He is far greater yet than all we have negated and affirmed.

This is the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ saying: "I cannot sufficiently extol Your praise! Verily, You are just as You have glorified Yourself."¹² Accordingly, all of His Names which form praise beyond

a book entitled *Iʿlam al-Khaʿid bi Tahrīm al-Qurʿan ʿala al-Junub wa al-Haʿid* ("The Appraisal of the Investigator Into the Interdiction of the Qur'an to Those in a State of Major Defilement and Women in Their Menses").

¹⁰See Appendix, "The Meaning of *Sunna*."

¹¹See Appendix, "The Enduring Good Deeds."

what can be known and seen, such as *al-A‘lā*, “the Highest,” and *al-Muta‘āl*, “the Sublime” – these names are incorporated into our saying *Allāhu akbar*.

Lā Ilāha Illallāh

Since there exists a being whose standing is such as we have mentioned, we now negate all possibility that there exist any other similar being or rival. We accomplish this by saying *lā ilāha illallāh*, “There is no God except Allah”: this is the fourth phrase.

Indeed, Godhead (*al-ulūhiyya*) attaches by right to deservingness of worship (*istihqāq al-‘ubūdiyya*), while none deserves worship except He Who possesses all the attributes we have mentioned. It follows that those of His Names that comprise all [His qualities] in a broad sense, such as *al-Wāhid*, “the One”; *al-Ahad*, “the One Alone”; *Dhu al-jalāl wa al-ikrām*, “The Owner of Majesty and Munificence” – all these are incorporated into our saying: *lā ilāha illallāh*.

Allah deserves to be worshipped precisely because it is obligatory for Him to possess all the different attributes of majesty and perfection which no-one can describe nor count:

*The wonders of your beauty do not come to an end,
Just like the sea; therefore extol it without restraint!*

Glorified is He for His magnificent rank and sovereignty! **﴿All that are in the heavens and the earth entreat Him﴾** (55:29) due to their utter dependence on Him. **﴿Every day He exercises universal power﴾** (*ibid.*), for He is able to so. To Him belong all creation, commandment, sovereignty, and dominion, while creatures are powerless in His grasp: **﴿And the heavens are rolled in His right hand﴾** (39:67), **﴿He punishes whom He will and He shows mercy unto whom He will, and unto Him you will be turned﴾** (29:22). Therefore, glorified is He Who pre-exists all in His Essence and Attributes, the Reviver of the dead Who brings the remains back together, Who knows all that was and all that shall be.

The All-Inclusiveness Of *Al-Hamdu Lillāh*

The Enduring Good Deeds could easily be incorporated into a single phrase out of the four as a general heading, and that is *al-hamdu lillāh*. As ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib عليه السلام said: “If I wished to load a camel with [books explaining] *al-hamdu lillāh*, I could easily do so.”

Indeed, glorification is praise, and praise consists in affirming perfection (*ithbāt al-kamāl*) at one time, and negating imperfection (*salb al-naqs*) at another; now declaring impotence to comprehend, and now affirming that He is alone in owning all perfection. Being alone in owning all perfection is among the highest levels that command eulogy and denote perfection (*min a‘la marātib al-madh wa al-kamāl*), and so this phrase comprises all that we have mentioned about the Enduring Good Deeds. For the definite article in the phrase [literally, “All *the* praise belongs to Allah”] signifies the comprehensive inclusion of the genus of eulogy and praise – the known as well as the unknown. Nor can any facet of praise be found not to apply to what we have mentioned. Nor is anyone deserving of divinity (*al-ilāhiyya*) except He Who possesses all the attributes which we have established.

¹²Narrated from ‘A’isha and ‘Ali in the Nine Books [al-Bukhari’s *Sahih*, Muslim’s *Sahih*, the four *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, al-Nasa’i, and Ibn Majah, the two *Musnaḍ* of Ahmad and al-Darimi’s, and Malik’s *Muwatta’*] except Bukhari and Darimi.

The Well-Defined And Universal Doctrine

This is the belief to which none fails to subscribe: neither angel brought near, nor prophet-messenger, nor anyone in the different religious communities (*milal*) except those whom Allah has abandoned so that they follow their lusts and disobey their Lord. Such people are engulfed in base physicality, thrown out of doors, and far gone from that Exalted Presence. It is the lot of whoever was prevented (*hujiba*) in this life from hallowing Him and knowing Him, to be prevented in the next life from receiving His munificence and seeing Him.

*Consent to the absentee's absence:
Such is an offense that carries its own punishment.*

The foregoing forms the general principles of al-Ash'ari's doctrine – may Allah have mercy on him – as well as those of the *Salaf* or Predecessors¹³ and the People of the Path and the Truth.¹⁴ It stands in relation to its own detailed elucidation like a drop of water in relation to a surging ocean:

*You have appeared and no longer remain hidden from anyone
Except the blind who are oblivious to the moon.*

The Anthropomorphists

The gross anthropomorphists (*al-Hashwiyya*) who liken Allah to creation (*al-mushabbiha*) are of two types: the first make no attempt to hide their anthropomorphism. **«And they think that they have something to stand upon. No, indeed! They are but liars.»** (58:18) The second type camouflage themselves with the school of the *Salaf*, hoping thereby to gain something from ill-gotten property, if only scraps to take with them.

*They make a show of piety before people
While going around looking for cash.*¹⁵

«They wish to gain your confidence with that of their people.» (4:91)

The Belief of the *Salaf*

The school of the Predecessors is but the upholding of Allah's oneness (*al-tawhīd*) and of His transcendence (*al-tanzīh*), without ascribing a body to Him (*al-tajsīm*) nor likening Him to creation (*al-*

¹³“The established technical definition of the term *salaf* is: the first three centuries in the age of this Muslim Community, the Community of our Master Muhammad, upon him blessings and peace. This is derived from his saying according to the narration of the Two Shaykhs [Bukhari and Muslim] from ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud: ‘The best of people are my century, then those that follow them, then those that follow the latter. After that there will come people who will be eager to commit perjury when bearing witness.’” Al-Buti, *al-Salafiyya*, Introduction.

¹⁴“The People of the Path and the Truth” refers to *Ahl al-Sunna* in general – as in the title – and is sometimes used in the restricted sense to mean the Sufis.

¹⁵Mahmud al-Warraaq (d. ~230), cited in *al-Uqd al-Farid* (3:216) and *al-Kashkul* (2:216).

tashbīh). Likewise, all the innovators claim that they follow the school of the Predecessors, just as the poet said:

*Each one proclaims his kinship to Layla
But Layla does not confirm it for any of them.*¹⁶

How can it be foisted upon the *Salaf* that they believed in ascribing a body to Allah and likening Him to creation, or that they kept quiet when innovations appeared, so thereby going against Allah's order **«And cover not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth knowingly»** (2:42), His saying **«And remember when Allah took a covenant from the People of the Scripture, to make it known and clear to mankind and not to hide it»** (3:187), and His saying **«That you may explain clearly to mankind what has been revealed for them»** (16:44)?

The Scholars' Duty is Patterned After That of Prophets

The scholars of knowledge are the inheritors of the Prophets.¹⁷ It is obligatory for them to communicate and explain whatever is obligatory for Prophets to communicate and explain. Allah said: **«Let there arise out of you a nation who invite to goodness, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency.»** (3:104) Among the foulest indecencies are to ascribe a body to Allah and to liken Him to creation; and of the highest good is the upholding of Allah's oneness and transcendence.

The Jihad of the *Salaf* Against Innovators

The Predecessors were silent only before innovations appeared. Thereafter – this I swear by the Lord of **the heaven which gives the returning rain and the earth which splits open with vegetation!** (86:11-12) – they sprung into action and went to work against the innovations that appeared. They repressed them with lasting efficiency and deterred their proponents with a terrible swift sword. They refuted the proponents of absolute free will (*al-Qadariyya*), the followers of Jahm ibn Safwan (*al-Jahmiyya*), the proponents of determinism or fatalism (*al-Jabriyya*), and other innovators. They **«struggled in His cause as one ought to struggle.»** (23:78)

The Duty of Jihad Against Anthropomorphists

Struggle for Allah (*al-jihād*) is of two types. One consists in striking the enemy with disputation and demonstration, the other in striking him with sword-blows and spears. Now, what on earth is the difference between confronting the *Hashwiyya* in disputation and confronting any other innovators?¹⁸ Unless it were for some wickedness buried deep inside the hearts, and aberrant belief hidden within – [they would not object]! **«They seek to hide from men and seek not to hide from Allah; but He is with them when by night they hold discourse displeasing unto Him.»** (4:108) Should one of them be asked about something related to gross anthropomorphism he promptly orders silence concerning it, whereas if he is asked about other than anthropomorphism among the innovations – at that time he answers

¹⁶ *Diwan al-Sababa* 3.

¹⁷ See Appendix, "The Scholars are the Inheritors of Prophets."

¹⁸ This question is still unanswered today by those who object to confronting certain grievous heresies on the grounds that "we should be united." The author's intent is to bring to light their hidden agreement with the deviations which they are unwilling to denounce.

truthfully. If his inner disposition (*bātinuhu*) did not harbor notions of ascribing a body to Allah and likening Him to creation, he would certainly have answered by upholding Allah's oneness and declaring His transcendence.

From its inception until now, that particular sect of innovators **«have been laid upon with shame wherever they are found»** (3:112). **«As often as they light a fire for war, Allah extinguishes it. Their effort is for corruption in the land, and Allah loves not corrupters.»** (5:64) No sooner does an opportunity loom for them on the horizon but they jump to it, nor a chance for causing confusion (*fitna*) but they pounce on it.

Ahmad Ibn Hanbal's Innocence of Their Heresies

Ahmad ibn Hanbal and the illustrious ones of his companions, as well as the rest of the learned scholars of the Predecessors are completely innocent before Allah of what has been attributed to them and invented in their name.¹⁹ How can anyone believe that Ahmad ibn Hanbal and others of the scholars of knowledge held that Allah's preternal quality is intrinsically the very same as the pronunciation of the reciters and the ink of the scribes (*wasf Allāh al-qadīm bi dhātihi huwa 'ayn lafz al-lāfizīn wa midād al-kātibīn*)!²⁰ – when Allah's quality is beginningless, while those utterances (*alfāz*) are originated in time (*hādītha*), as reason dictates and transmitted evidence explicitly states?

Proofs Against The Preternality of Recitation And Writing

Allah has declared the contingent nature (*hudūth*) [of recitation and writing] in three passages of His Book. The first passage is His saying: **«Never comes there unto them a new reminder (*dhikr*) from their Lord»** (21:2). He has referred to what was coming to them as “new” (*muhdath*). Therefore, whoever claims that it is beginningless has rebutted Allah ﷻ.²¹

Yes, this “new” is a sign (*dalīl*) pointing to the beginningless, just as if we should write the exalted Name of Allah on a piece of paper: the preternal Lord would not thereby become indwelt or incarnate (*hāllan*) in that paper. Similarly, if the beginningless quality is written down some-where, that written quality does not become indwelt where the writing took place.

¹⁹Ibn al-Jawzi wrote in the introduction of his *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbih*: “I have advised both follower and leader in those terms: Colleagues! You are adherents and followers of our *madhhab*. Your greatest Imam is Ahmad ibn Hanbal, may Allah have mercy on him, who said, under the lash of the ordeal: ‘How can I say what was never said?’ Therefore, beware of innovating in his *madhhab* what is not from him! . . . Do not introduce into the *madhhab* of this man of the *Salaf*, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, what his thought does not contain.” Similarly Ibn ‘Asakir narrated in his *Tabyin* (Saqqā ed. p. 164-165) that the hadith master Ibn Shahin al-Hanbali (d. 385) said: “Two righteous men have been afflicted due to evil people: Ja‘far ibn Muhammad and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.” Ibn al-Salah (d. 643) said: “Two imams have been afflicted because of their followers although they are innocent of them: Ahmad ibn Hanbal was tried with the anthropomorphists (*al-mujassima*), and Ja‘far al-Sadiq with the [Shi‘i] Rejectionists (*al-Rāfida*).” Quoted by Ibn al-Subki in his *Qa‘ida* (p. 43), also found in his *Tabaqat al-Shafi‘iyya al-Kubra* (2:17).

²⁰See Appendix, “The Controversy Over the Pronunciation of the Qur’an” and al-Bayhaqi’s documentation in our translation of *al-Asma’ wa al-Sifat*, published separately.

²¹Imam Ahmad said of this verse: “It is possible that ‘new’ refers to the bringing down to us of the reminder, not to the reminder itself, and it is possible that the reminder be other than the Qur’an, such as the Prophet’s ﷺ reminder and his admonishing them.” Related by al-Bayhaqi in *al-Asma’ wa al-Sifat* (al-Kawthari ed. p. 235; al-Hashidi ed. 1:572-573 #499) and Ibn Kathir in his *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* (10:361). See Appendix, “The Controversy over the Pronunciation of the Qur’an”.

The second passage is Allah's saying: **«But nay! I swear by all that you see and all that you see not that it is indeed the speech of an illustrious messenger.»** (69:38-40) The messenger's speech is an attribute of his, and the quality of this contingent (*hādīth*) is itself a contingent which points to the preternal speech (*yadullu 'alā al-kalām al-qadīm*). And whoever claims that the messenger's speech is beginningless has rebutted the Lord of the worlds.

Allah did not content Himself to merely declare the above but He swore to it with a most perfect oath and said: **«But nay! I swear by all that you see and all that you see not.»** Into this oath are incorporated His Essence and Attributes, and His creation besides.

The third passage is His saying: **«But nay! I swear by the planets, the stars which rise and set, and the close of night, and the breath of morning, that this is in truth the word of an honored messenger.»** (81:15-19)

Proofs Against Those Who Confuse Letter and Voice

One wonders at those who say: "The Qur'an is a combination of letter and voice" (*al-Qur'ān murakkabun min harfin wa sawt*) and then claim that all that is found in the volume of Qur'an (*al-mushaf*) when there is not, in the volume, other than the letter alone (*harf mujarrad*), without voice. There is not in it any letter formed of voice. For the letter which is uttered (*al-harf al-lafzī*) is not the same as the written character (*al-shakl al-kitābī*). For that reason one perceives by ear the letter which is uttered, without seeing it, and one observes by eyesight the written character, without hearing it with the ears. May Allah not increase among the Muslims the number of the people of innovation and passion, misguidance and seduction!

Proofs Against Those Who Claim The *Mushaf* Is Preeternal

As for those who say that the preternal divine quality is indwelt in the volume of Qur'an: they are compelled to conclude, if the volume of Qur'an is destroyed by fire, that Allah's preternal quality was burnt – most exalted is He high above what they say! It is a characteristic of what is beginningless not to be subject to change nor annihilation, for these certainly negate beginninglessness.

If they should claim that the Qur'an is written in the volume of Qur'an without indwelling in it, as al-Ash'ari said, then why do they curse al-Ash'ari – may Allah have mercy on him?²² If they say other than that, then **«See how they invent lies about Allah! That of itself is flagrant sin.»** (4:50) **«And on the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied concerning Allah with their faces blackened. Is not the home of the scorners in hell?»** (39:60)

²²Ibn 'Asakir wrote in his *Tabyin* (Saqqā ed. p. 151): "The *Mu'tazila* said: 'Allah's speech is created, invented, and brought into being.' The *Hashwiyya* who attribute a body to Allah said: 'The alphabetical characters (*al-hurūf al-muqatta'a*), the materials on which they are written, the colors in which they are written, and all that is between the two covers [of the volumes of Qur'an] is beginningless and preternal (*qadīma azaliyya*).' Al-Ash'ari took a middle road between them and said: 'The Qur'an is Allah's beginningless speech unchanged, uncreated, not of recent origin in time, nor brought into being. As for the alphabetical characters, the materials, the colors, the voices, the elements that are subject to limitations (*al-mahdūdāt*), and all that is subject to modality (*al-mukayyafāt*) in the world – all this is created, brought into being, and invented.'"

As for Allah's saying: **«That this is indeed a noble Qur'an in a Book kept hidden»** (56:77-78), the imams of the Arabic language agree that there is definitely an ellipsis (*kalima mahdhūfa*) in His saying: **«in a Book kept hidden»**: and it is obligatory to understand this ellipsis to mean: "written in a Book kept hidden." This is due to the reasons we have mentioned above, and in accordance to the criteria of reason (*al-'aql*) which testifies to divine oneness and the veracity of the Prophetic Message.

Proofs Against Those Who Reject Reason

Reason is the indispensable condition of legal responsibility (*manāt al-taklīf*) according to the consensus of Muslims. However, reason was not adduced as a proof for preternality (*lam yustadall bi al-'aql 'alā al-qidam*): it is sufficient that it witnesses to it. Now they do not listen to its testimony, although the divine Law has long declared reason an upright witness (*al-shar' qad 'addala al-'aql*), accepting its testimony, and has even adduced it as a proof in certain points of its Book. Examples are the inference of [the logical truth of] revival (*al-i'āda*) from [the known fact] of origination (*al-inshā'*); or Allah's saying: **«If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both!»** (21:22); or His saying: **«Have they not considered the dominion (*malakūt*) of the heavens and the earth, and what things Allah has created?»** (7:185)

Miserable indeed is the failure of him who rejects a witness whom Allah has accepted, and invalidates a proof Allah has produced! For they refer themselves [only] to what was textually transmitted (*al-manqūl*).²³ Because of that, we have cited only textually transmitted proofs, and we have kept securely hidden those based on reason: if we need them we can produce them, otherwise we can leave them until we do.

More Proofs Against The Preternality of Recitation

A group-transmitted (*mashhūr*) hadith states: "Whoever recites the Qur'an and pronounces it clearly and distinctly (*a'rabahu*) receives ten blessings for each letter, and whoever recites it without pronouncing it clearly and distinctly receives one blessing for each letter."²⁴ However, what is beginningless cannot be marred by faulty expression (*al-lahn*) nor made perfect by means of clear and distinct pronunciation. And Allah said: **«You will be requited nothing other than what you have done.»** (37:39) Therefore, if His Prophet informed us that we would be rewarded for the recitation of the Qur'an he indicated thereby that such recitation is one of our actions – and our actions are by no means without beginning.

²³See Appendix, "The Literalist Invalidation of Reason."

²⁴This hadith is weak in its attribution to the Prophet ﷺ, as indicated by the author in his unattributive way of citing it, in accordance with the requirements of the Law when citing a weak hadith. Various forms of the narration are related from the Prophet ﷺ through at least five Companions – hence the nomenclature of *mashhūr* – but with weak or very weak chains, by al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Iman* (5:241 #2096-2097), Ibn 'Adi in *al-Kamil fi al-Du'afa'* (7:2506), and al-Tabarani as stated by al-Haythami in the book of the Merits of the Qur'an in *Majma' al-Zawa'id*. Of note is the following saying of 'Umar: "Recite the Qur'an and do not leave out its clear and distinct pronunciation." Something close to it is also related from Ibn Mas'ud, both narrated by Ibn Aby Shayba in his *Musannaf* (1:158, 2:160). There is a sound narration from Ibn Mas'ud narrated by al-Tirmidhi, who graded it *hasan sahih gharib* ("authentic, narrated by only one Companion"), whereby the Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever reads one letter of the Qur'an has performed a good deed, for which he receives ten the like thereof. I do not say that 'A. L. M.' (2:1) are a letter but 'A.' is a letter, 'L.' is a letter, and 'M.' is a letter."

Allah's Naming of the Recitation *Qur'ān*

The Qur'an and the Sunna were brought to the people in a context of utter ignorance and in the midst of simple minds and dull wits. Indeed, the word *qur'ān* applies, both in the divine Law and in language, to the beginningless object of description (*al-wasf al-qadīm*); but it also applies to the contingent recitation (*al-qirā'a al-hāditha*). Allah said: **«Upon Us rest the putting together thereof and its qur'ān.»** (75:17) That is: its recitation.²⁵

For the act of recitation (*al-qirā'a*) is different from what is being read (*al-maqrū'*): the act of recitation is of recent origin in time while what is being recited is beginningless. Similarly, when we remember or mention Allah, our remembrance is of recent origin while what is remembered is beginningless.

The foregoing is but a glimpse of the school of al-Ash'ari on the topic.

*If Hadhāmi speaks, believe her.
Verily the truth is what Hadhāmi spoke!*²⁶

The Duty to Speak Out Against Anthropomorphists

There is too much to be said on the topic. If it were not incumbent upon the scholars to strengthen the Religion and undermine innovators, and if the gross anthropomorphists had not unleashed their tongues in our time to commit calumnies against those who uphold Allah's oneness, and to spread contempt against the words of those who declare Allah's transcendence – otherwise I would not have spoken at length on a topic such as this, which is clear as day.

However, Allah has ordered us to struggle in the cause of His Religion. The only difference is that the scholar's weapons are his knowledge and his tongue, while the king's weapons are his swords and spears. Just as it is not allowed for kings to put down their weapons in the face of the atheists (*al-*

²⁵Al-Bukhari narrated in the first book of his *Sahih* (Book of Revelation) as well as Muslim in his *Sahih* (Book of Prayer, chapter entitled "Listening to the Recitation"):

From Ibn 'Abbas concerning the saying of the Exalted: **«Do not move your tongue with it in order to hasten it.»** (75:16) He said: "Allah's Messenger ﷺ experienced a certain difficulty in the process of revelation. He was of those who would move their lips [i.e. mnemonically, along with hearing recitation]. And I shall move my lips for you in the way Allah's Messenger ﷺ used to move them."

"Then Allah sent down: **'Do not move your tongue with it in order to hasten it. [i.e. its memorization] Its gathering and recitation rest upon us.'**" (75:16-17) Ibn 'Abbas said: "That is: its gathering in your breast and subsequent recitation."

'And when We recite it, follow its recital.' (75:18) Ibn 'Abbas said: "That is: listen to it and keep silent."

'Then verily upon Us rests its exposition.' (75:19) Ibn 'Abbas said: "That is: Upon Us rests its recitation by yourself." [Shaykh Mustafa Dīb al-Bughā in his edition of *al-Tajrid al-Sarih* elaborated it to mean: the permanency of your memorization of it leading to its appearance on your tongue, also explained as the detailing of its generalities, the elaboration of its complexities, the exposition of what is in it concerning the permitted and the forbidden, and other than that.]

"After this, when Jibril came to him the Prophet ﷺ would listen, and after Jibril left the Prophet ﷺ would recite it in the manner Jibril had recited it."

²⁶Lujaym ibn Sa'b or Wasim ibn Tariq, as quoted in *Lisan al-'Arab* in the entries *h-dh-m* and *r-q-sh*, also *Mughni al-Labib* (#404), *Shudhur al-Dhahab* (38:95), *Awdah al-Masalik* (1:131 #482), Ibn 'Aqil's *Tafsir* (1:85 #16), etc. This verse is a *locus classicus* (*shāhid*) of Arabic grammar to illustrate the dialect of the Hijaz concerning the syntagm *fa'al*. See Ibn Hisham al-Ansari's (d. 761) *Qatr al-Nada*, chapter on *Hadhām*.

mulhidīn) and the Christians (*al-mushrikīn*),²⁷ similarly, it is not allowed for scholars to still their tongues in the face of the heretics (*al-zā'ighīn*) and the innovators (*al-mubtadi'īn*).

Whoever struggles with all his strength for Allah's sake so as to bring up high Allah's Religion, is going to be worthy of Allah's watchful protection, empowered with His invincible strength, defended with His support, and protected from the entire host of creation. **﴿And if Allah willed He could have punished them (Himself), but (thus it is ordained) that He may try some of you by means of others.﴾** (47:4)

Those who declare Allah's transcendence and His oneness have given and continue to give the same answers for all the world to see, at every celebration and in every place of assembly. They declare it aloud in the schools and in the mosques. The innovation of the *Hashwiyya*, however, has been kept hidden and concealed in secrecy. They have been unable to bring it out into the open, but they have instilled it to the ignorant masses. They are only beginning to bring it out into the open in our time.

Therefore we ask Allah to hasten the ruin of that innovation as is His custom, and to let its humiliation come to pass as has been His way in the past, and according to the path of those who uphold Allah's transcendence and oneness, on which the Followers (*al-Khalaf*) and the Predecessors (*al-Salaf*) have both proceeded. May Allah be well pleased with all of them.

They Attack Al-Ash'ari for Attributing Causality to Allah

It is a wonder that they blame al-Ash'ari because he said: "Bread does not satiate, water does not quench thirst, fire does not burn [in themselves]"! For this discourse Allah Himself has revealed – in its meaning – in his Book. Indeed, satiation, quenching, and combustion are phenomena which Allah alone creates, since bread does not create satiation, nor does water create quenching, nor does fire create combustion, although they are causes for such results. But the Creator is Himself the Causator (*al-Musabbib*), not the causes.²⁸

This is just as Allah said: **﴿You threw not when you did throw, but Allah threw.﴾** (8:17) He denied that His Prophet was the creator of the throw, although he was its cause. Allah also said: **﴿And that it is He Who makes laugh, and makes weep, and that it is He Who gives death and gives life.﴾** (54:43-44) Thus He dissociated making-laugh, making-weep, the giving of death and of life from their respective causes, attributing all to Himself.

²⁷The author means the Mongols and the Franks who were attacking al-Sham at the time.

²⁸See Ibn Khafif's *Aqida* §41 ("Things do not act of their own nature..."), published separately. Cf. al-Zahawi in *al-Fajr al-Sadiq*: "Food does not sate, nor does water quench thirst, nor does medicine heal. But the One who is the real Satisfier of our hunger, the Quencher of our thirst and the Healer of our ills is Allah alone. The food, the water, the medicine are only the proximate or secondary causes which custom has established on the surface of things by our mind's regular association of them with certain concomitant events." As translated in *The Doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna Versus the "Salafi" Movement* (p. 86). A man asked al-Tustari: "What is sustenance?" He said: "Perpetual *dhikr*." The man said: "I was not asking about that, but about what sustains one." He replied: "O man! Things are sustained by nothing but Allah." The man said: "I did not mean that, I asked you about what is indispensable!" He replied: "Young man, Allah is indispensable." Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya* (10:218 #15022). This is the consensus of *Ahl al-Sunna*, as opposed to the Shi'a, the *Mu'tazila*, and the philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd. The latter three groups subscribed to Aristotelian causality (*al-'illa al-aristiyya*) i.e. the belief that causes are given a degree of inherent causality. Ibn Taymiyya was attacked for endorsing this belief in his *al-Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyin* ("Against Logicians"). Cf. al-Buti, *al-Salafiyya* (p. 173).

Similarly, al-Ash'ari dissociated satiation, quenching, and combustion from their causes, attributing them all to the Creator Who said: **«Such is Allah, your Lord. There is no God save Him, the Creator of all things.»** (6:102) **«Is there any creator other than Allah?»** (35:3) **«Nay, but they denied what they could not comprehend and whereof the interpretation had not yet come unto them.»** (10:39) **«Did you deny My signs when you could not compass them in knowledge, or what was it you did?»** (27:84)

*How many do reprove a truthful word
When it is they who suffer from deficient understanding?*²⁹

Therefore, glory to Him Who has approved of some whom He brought nearer to Him, and shown wrath to others whom He kept far from Him. **«He will not be questioned as to what He does, but they will be questioned.»** (21:23)

Truth and Right Are Dearer Than Life

It is incumbent on every scholar of knowledge, when he sees truth brought low and right undermined, to muster every strength of his in order to assist truth and right. He must consider himself more deserving of humiliation and incapacitation than truth and right. If he strengthens the truth and brings up high the right, let him but seek their shade, and content himself with droplets of whatever [gain] may come from elsewhere.

*A little from you benefits me, although
The little that comes from you cannot be called little.*

To risk one's life in the cause of strengthening the Religion is licit. Thus it is permitted for heroic individuals among the Muslims to plunge into the battle-ranks of the disbelievers. Similarly, to incur danger in the act of commanding good and forbidding evil, aiding to uphold the bases of the Religion through proofs and evidences, is licit. Whoever fears for his life is no longer obligated but merely encouraged to do it. As for those who say that exposing one's life to danger is impermissible, they have gone far from truth and left what is right.

Allah Prefers Whoever Prefers Him

In sum, whoever prefers Allah above himself, Allah will prefer him. Whoever seeks Allah's approval with what angers people, Allah shall be well-pleased with him and shall make people pleased with him also. But whoever seeks people's approval with what displeases Allah, Allah shall be angry with him and shall make people angry with him also. There is sufficiency, in Allah's approval, from that of everybody else.

*So long as You are sweet, let all life be bitter.
So long as You are pleased, let all creatures be wroth.*³⁰

And

²⁹ Al-Mutanabbi, *Diwan* (4:246). Compare with Imam Taqi al-Din Ibn al-Subki's (d. 756) description of a major anti-Ash'ari scholar as "one whose learning exceeded his intelligence" in his *al-Rasa'il al-Subkiyya* (p. 151-152).

³⁰ Abu Firas al-Hamadani, *Diwan* (1:24).

*All things lost can be replaced
But Allah has not, if you lose Him, any replacement.*

The Prophet ﷺ said: “Keep Allah well and He shall keep you well. Keep Allah well and you shall find Him in front of you” (*tajidhu amāmak*).³¹

It has also been mentioned in the hadith: “Remind Allah of yourselves! In truth, Allah gives His servant the same status in His presence as that which His servant gives Him in himself.”³² Accordingly one of the eminent authorities said: “Whoever wants to know in what regard Allah holds him, let him see in what regard he holds Allah.”

Final Supplication

O Allah! Grant victory to the Truth! Bring up high the right! Confirm for this Community right conduct, whereby Your Friends shall be firmly established and Your enemies brought low, obedience to You put into practice, and rebellion against you firmly kept in check!

And all praise belongs to Allah Who is my support and upon Whom I rely. He is sufficient for me. Most excellent is He in Whom I trust! And may Allah send blessings and peace, honor and favor, praise and munificence on our Master Muhammad, and upon his Family and all his Companions. *Āmīn. Āmīn.*



³¹Some versions other than Tirmidhi’s mention the wording cited here, while Tirmidhi’s version mentions: “and you shall find Him facing you” (*tajidhu tujāhak*). Narrated from Ibn ‘Abbas as part of a longer hadith by Ahmad in his *Musnad* with a sound chain as stated by Shaykh Ahmad Shakir in his edition (3:194 #2669); Tirmidhi in his *Sunan* with two similar chains, and he graded it *hasan sahīh*; Bayhaqi in *al-Asma’ wa al-Sifat* (al-Hashidi ed. 1:188 #126) – as part of his explanation of Allah’s attributes *al-Dārr al-Nāfi’* (“The Bringer of Harm and of Benefit”) – with a sound chain as stated by its editor ‘Abd Allah al-Hashidi; and Abu Ya’la al-Musili in his *Musnad* (4:430 #2556). Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali cites it in his *Jami’ al-‘Ulum wa al-Hikam* (“The Compendium of the Sciences and the Words of Wisdom”) and declares it authentic (1:359-361). Imam al-Nawawi cites it in his *Riyad al-Salihin* and as the nineteenth of his “Forty Hadiths.” The complete narration states: “I was [riding] behind the Prophet ﷺ one day and he said to me: ‘O my boy! I shall teach you certain words. Keep Allah, and He will keep you. Keep Allah, and you shall find Him facing you. If you ask for something, ask Allah. If you ask for help, ask it from Allah. Know with certainty that if the entire Community gathered together to support you, they can benefit you nothing but what Allah has foreordained for you; and if they gathered together in order to harm you, they can harm you in nothing but what Allah has foreordained against you. The quills have been raised and the records are dry.’” Imam Ahmad added in his narration: “Make yourself known to Allah in the time of prosperity and He shall know you in the time of affliction. Know that patience in the face of what you hate is an immense good, that help lies with patience, deliverance with trial, and with hardship goes ease.”

³²Narrated from Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah by al-Hakim in the *Mustadrak* (1:494), al-Bazzar in his *Musnad*, al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat*, al-Bayhaqi in *Shu’ab al-Iman*, Abu Ya’la in his *Musnad*, Ibn Shahin, and Ibn ‘Asakir, all with chains containing ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Allah Mawla Ghufra, declared trustworthy by Ahmad, Muhammad ibn Sa’d, and al-Bazzar, but weak by Yahya ibn Ma’in al-Nasa’i, Ibn Hibban, al-Dhahabi, and Ibn Hajar as stated in *Mizan al-I’tidal* (3:210 #6155) and *Taqrib al-Tahdhib* (p. 414 #4934). The narration is therefore weak, and the author accordingly referred to it in non-attributive, passive mode.

